

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Rumsfeld for Defense

While George Bush lost the battle over John Tower, his congressional enemies have paid a fearsome toll for their victory. The President has conserved and even consolidated his forces, and has won important new opportunities in the war ahead. We only hope these opportunities are not thrown away by a hasty choice for Mr. Tower's replacement.

History raises this warning. The Bork defeat, after all, was followed by the even more vulnerable Ginsburg nomination. Years earlier, the undeserved defeat of Supreme Court nominee Clement Haynsworth was followed by the justifiable defeat of Harold Carswell. After such intense battles, Presidents and senior White House staff seem to have a tendency to rush ahead with the preconceptions they carried into the battle, rather than standing back to take account of the new situation it has created.

The priority for President Bush now is to retain and consolidate the high ground in an unmistakable way, drawing the contrast with the Senate Democrats' partisan pettiness. He should find a dignified new appointment for John Tower, something along the lines of Ambassador to the United Nations, a highly visible post where any attacks on drinking habits would be laughable. And he should nominate a new Defense Secretary who is both unimpeachable and no concession to the Senate mob.

A new Defense Secretary needs three qualifications. There must be no doubt he can handle the job technically. He must be as nearly above personal attack as possible in this day and age. And he must be able to stand up to Sam Nunn and the Senate Democrats in a political fashion, pursuing neither confrontation nor compromise for its own sake but advancing the President's agenda.

It is not the habit of this newspaper to endorse named individuals for specific posts. But we do think our emphatic support of the Tower nomination gives us a special standing to be heard, and in a way an obligation to share our views of what should happen next. And we think that of all the names in speculation for the appointment, one stands out above all in fulfilling the criteria sketched above.

Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is the obvious choice. He already has demonstrated he can run the Pentagon ably, and of course has already once passed the confirmation test. While he is not exactly beloved

inside the Beltway, we have heard no doubts about his integrity. When he left the Pentagon, he avoided defense contracting and compiled an enviable record as chief executive of G.D. Searle, a drug company later bought by Monsanto. Most important, his political experience as a Congressman, White House Chief of Staff and early presidential candidate gives him a political expertise and standing unique among the widely mentioned potential candidates.

Everyone in Washington knows this, of course, and most would probably agree these qualifications are pre-eminent. Mr. Rumsfeld's disqualifications are the usual Beltway jetsam: When he dropped out of the presidential race, he endorsed Bob Dole rather than George Bush. And there was some Bush-Rumsfeld problem in the Ford administration, variously described as Rumsfeld opposition to or support of the Bush appointment to the CIA.

The CIA matter is spelled out in the George Bush-Victor Gold book "Looking Forward." Cronies warned Mr. Bush that his CIA appointment was designed to keep him out of the vice-presidential nomination in 1976, and that it was a Rumsfeld ploy. The book says he accepted Mr. Rumsfeld's denials; if he has further doubts, and if it matters, it surely could be cleared up with a call to Jerry Ford. As for the recent primaries, by appointing Elizabeth Dole and Jack Kemp to cabinet posts, President Bush already has proved he can rise above such resentments. For that matter, Robert Dole's performance in the Tower debate shows why a former congressional colleague might endorse him.

The Washington Post _____
The New York Times _____
The Washington Times _____
The Wall Street Journal A16
The Christian Science Monitor _____
New York Daily News _____
USA Today _____
The Chicago Tribune _____

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Any truly serious candidate for Defense Secretary, of course, would want to have some understanding with the President about general directions of defense policy and personnel appointments, but that is precisely the kind of man George Bush now needs to name. We would not want to say there is one and only one acceptable candidate, but we would say this: It is by now widely recognized that the Tower battle was not merely about one appointment but about the character and course of the Bush presidency. The same is true of the choice of a new nominee. The President and his men need to give long and careful thought to finding the best possible man to show that despite Congress, the administration can and will hold to its own course.